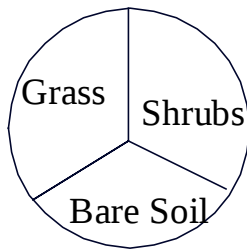




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 9 Issue 1 Spring 2010

This newsletter issue starts the ninth year of an effort aimed at cooperators and sports-people in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Missouri Extension. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov or 816-232-6555 x122 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use **shrubs** as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a **diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground** with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

Another Red Herring: “The Evil” Turkey

Tom Dailey, Ph.D., Resource Scientist, Columbia, MO

What do red herring and turkeys have to do with quail management? Nothing, directly, but of the many scapegoats conjured up to explain the quail decline, this is one of the worst. I first heard the 'turkeys doing harm to quail' claim in the late 1980s when Quail Unlimited Magazine published a Missouri quail hunter's letter to the editor. Unfortunately, with turkeys being so visible, this myth still has life.

A *red herring* is a fallacy conjured up to divert attention away from a real issue. For quail management, innocent observations of more turkeys and fewer quail, or more predators and fewer quail (reviewed in Covey Headquarters Fall 2008 issue), have diverted attention away from the real issue; lack of suitable quail habitat. These “evil turkeys” have also been blamed for the decline in ruffed grouse populations in the Appalachians. Although these fallacies are innocent and not intended to hurt quail restoration, the effect is the same. The “evil turkey” belief diminishes serious quail management because it leads to mistrust of conservation agencies, it wastes biologists' time, and it confuses hunters and landowners.

Is there a link between the rise of turkeys and fall of quail? Yes, it's habitat! Here is yet another opportunity to consider the decline of quail, and the **true** cause of that decline.

The 2002 Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) quail management booklet, *On The Edge—A Guide for Managing Bobwhite Quail*, reviewed the connection between turkeys and quail and pointed to changing habitat, not turkeys *per se*, as the cause of the quail decline. The rumors have persisted, however, and in 2009 a Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks article by biologist Jim Pitman, *The Truth about Turkeys—Improved Turkey Habitat Can Conflict With Needs of Quail*, also identified changing habitat as the cause of the quail decline:

“Some hunters have speculated that because turkey populations are on the rise and quail are in decline in the same areas of the state, then turkeys must be eating quail or competing with them for resources. They assume turkeys are having a negative impact on quail. In reality, both populations have been influenced by a large-scale landscape conversion that has occurred over several decades.”

From Appalachian Mountains to Kansas prairies, what is the connection between turkeys and quail (or grouse), and what exactly do turkeys eat? Here are the facts on turkey foods and the habitat connection between turkeys and quail.

1. What is the possibility that turkeys destroy and/or eat quail nests or chicks?

In one of the nation's first quail studies in the 1930's in northern Florida, a researcher named Herbert Stoddard found *circumstantial* evidence of domestic and wild turkeys destroying quail nests and eating eggs. The researchers observed interactions between the species, but never examined turkey stomachs to validate their theories. In modern times biologists have observed wild turkeys eating small animals such as lizards, so it is possible that turkeys could opportunistically eat quail eggs or chicks.

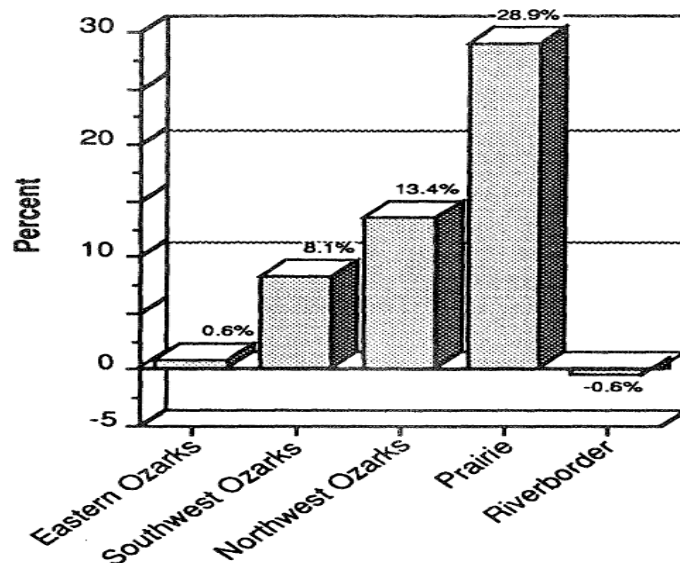
2. What is the possibility that turkeys are negatively affecting quail populations?

No biological study has found turkeys damaging or depredating quail nests or chicks. This lack of solid evidence is remarkable because there have been hundreds of studies of turkeys and quail. Turkey researchers have not found a single quail chick or egg fragments while examining thousands of turkey stomachs. In addition, quail researchers using radio transmitters on chicks and remote cameras on nests have documented thousands of cases of predation by snakes, furbearers, crows, armadillos and even deer, but no turkey has been caught in the act. The logical conclusion is that turkey depredation on quail is nonexistent or at best an exceedingly rare event, and consequently, turkeys have no role in the decline of quail.

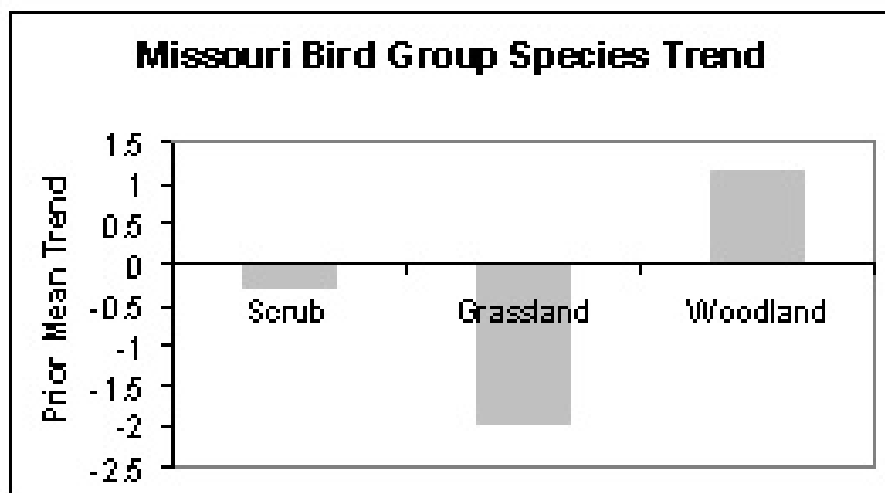
3. Why have turkeys seemingly replaced quail in many areas?

In *Quail Management*, a 1980 MDC brochure, long-time quail biologist Jack Stanford warned that quail populations were headed downward because of loss of suitable habitat. Among the major habitat changes that have negatively affected quail, one that relates to turkeys is the increase in forest habitat. The amount of Missouri's forested acreage has increased steadily, from 12.9 million acres in 1972 to 15.3 million acres in 2006. Some habitats favored by bobwhites are disappearing before our eyes. Old fields once dominated by grass, weeds and brush are now covered by cedars. The increase in cedars is reflected in harvest figures, and MDC data show that cedar harvest has increased from 2.7 million cubic feet in 1989 to 4.8 million in 2000. Because of the increase in forest habitats, turkeys have colonized many parts of the state that were formally bobwhite strongholds, particularly prairies in western and northern Missouri. From 1972 to 1989 the largest increase in forest area, 28.9%, occurred in these prairies, as shown in the figure below (USDA-USFS Resource Bulletin NC-139).

Percent change in timberland area from 1972 to 1989 in different regions of Missouri



The natural replacement by trees of open land habitats such as prairies, pastures, glades and savannas has dramatically changed Missouri's bird populations. The graph below shows population trends from 1969 to 1999 for groups of Missouri birds by their preferred habitat type. Bobwhites fall in the scrub habitat type, grasshopper sparrows and dickcissels are common birds in the grassland type and turkeys are in the woodland type. Abundance trends for birds in the open land habitats are negative, whereas woodland birds have been increasing. Of particular concern is the continued decline of greater prairie-chickens. This species is nearly extinct in our prairie landscapes, whereas turkeys became established as plant succession outpaced management.



4. Can we manage for both Quail and Turkey?

Turkeys and quail have similar habitat needs. For example, both use native grass for nesting, forbs and legumes for bugging and row crops and acorns for winter food. The trees that turkeys require for roosting are compatible with quail management. Practices such as edge feathering can provide the brush, briars and tangles that protect quail from predators and the elements. And most habitat restoration efforts today, such as savanna, glade and woodland restoration, are done to improve populations of quail, turkeys, woodcock and other migratory birds.

In conclusion, habitat is the reason quail are scarce and turkeys are abundant. Over the past 40 years Missouri's landscape has evolved into poorer cover for quail and better cover for turkeys and deer. Although it is impossible for MDC to change landscape trends throughout the state, it is possible to restore open land habitats in select areas. MDC and partners such as the USDA, Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Districts, National Bobwhite Technical Committee/National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, Quail Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, Partners in Flight and Missouri Prairie Foundation, are targeting public and private areas around the state, including public land Quail Emphasis Areas, private/public land Quail Focus Areas and Conservation Opportunity Areas.

Strategic and technical guidance for Missouri's efforts are provided by the Missouri Department of Conservation Strategic Guidance for Northern Bobwhite Recovery 2003-2013, and by the Missouri Quail and Grassland Bird Technical Committee. Among many accomplishments in the state, Missouri made national news when Scott and Cass Counties were recognized as the first and second in the nation to reach habitat restoration goals of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (<http://www.bobwhitetechnet.org/index.html>). Highlights of the progress and challenges of these efforts are provided in the 2008 report of the MDC Strategic Guidance for Northern Bobwhite Recovery. The Strategic Guidance and annual updates can be found under *Related Information* at <http://mdc.mo.gov/landown/wild/quail/>.

What's Up with All the Blue Signs around Sweet Springs?

Brent Vandeloecht, Private Land Conservationist, Marshall, MO

You may have noticed that there are a bunch of blue signs showing up in fencerows and along the road in southern Saline County that say "Sweet Springs Quail Focus Area: Bobwhite Quails' Future is in Landowners' Hands". These signs are intended to showcase the wildlife management work that has been implemented in the Sweet Springs Quail Focus Area. Once a landowner in the focus area implements practices to improve the local quail habitat conditions, they receive one of these signs to promote their restored quail habitat.

If you have noticed these signs, it becomes readily apparent that there are many great cooperators in southwestern Saline County making positive impacts on quail habitat. As many of you know, the Missouri Department of Conservation keys in on improving quail habitat for several reasons. First and foremost, good quail habitat means high quality habitat for other game species like turkey and deer. Furthermore, quail are a poster child for about 35 species of ground nesting birds that have shown decreasing population trends since the 1970's. Biologists have determined that this trend is due to many factors, but habitat loss is the primary factor, but that is another article for another time.

The purpose of this article is to talk about a different partnership that is unique to the Sweet Springs Quail Focus Area. Two years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Michele Reinke, a biology professor at Missouri Valley College in Marshall. Michele and some of her students helped MDC with our 2008 fall quail monitoring efforts in the focus area along with a few local volunteers including members of the Corner Covey Chapter of Quail Forever (QF). The results from that management and evaluation project in 2008 showed that we were hearing twice as many coveys of quail inside the focus area as were outside the focus area. This was fantastic news because it indicates the habitat work in Saline County is paying dividends!

Last fall, I had a meeting with leaders of the Corner Covey Chapter of QF and we discussed the possibility of continuing this project again in 2009 with help from Missouri Valley College. The President of the Corner Covey, Craig Poppinga suggested we approach the local FFA students to see if they would be interested in helping with this community based project. This sounded like an excellent idea to me especially since Sweet Springs FFA has had a remarkable track record of producing strong leaders thru their FFA program. The next day, I approached Mrs. Kristen Fenner, FFA teacher at Sweet Springs and inquired about making the FFA chapter a partner in this local cooperative monitoring effort. Not only did the Sweet Springs FFA come thru with several volunteer's, they also agreed to help me with another project that I wanted to get off the ground - getting some recognition for the local wildlife stewards in the focus area. MDC was able to print up signs, the Corner Covey came up with some materials to hang the signs and the local FFA chapter has posted the blue signs all over fencerows in the community to promote the Sweet Springs Focus Area.

The partnership that has developed between the Sweet Springs FFA chapter, Missouri Valley College, the Corner Covey Chapter of Quail Forever, local farmers and MDC to promote the Sweet Springs Quail Focus area has been unequalled anywhere else in the state to my knowledge. This unique partnership is something that the entire community can rally around because it is an excellent example of grassroots conservation. Partnerships such as this are the cornerstone a successful restoration effort and my hat is off to the producers in Saline County, the members of the sweet Springs FFA, Missouri Valley College and the volunteers from the Corner covey chapter of Quail Forever . Next time you run into some of these students, volunteers or producers that are improving quail habitat and protecting our natural resources, be sure to shake their hand and thank them for their efforts. I know I will! Visit <http://salinespringsconservation.wordpress.com/> a blog originating from Saline County for further information on conservation practices and technical information you can use to improve your property for fish, forest and wildlife.

Sweet Springs FFA students helping promote community conservation!



Quail Focus Areas – Targeting private land habitat work

MDC is targeting habitat restoration on two fronts. Quail Emphasis Areas (QEAs) include 19 Conservation Areas where quail management is the focus. Quail Focus Areas (QFAs) are larger and primarily target private land. QFAs were selected in areas where landowners were already managing for quail, near conservation areas with good quail habitat, and/or where conservation partners have expressed an interest in quail management. Today, there are 34 QFAs located throughout the state. Many focus areas are around 30,000 acres in size, but some are even larger because of wide-spread landowner interest and success. Within focus areas, staffs have been working with landowners to improve quail habitat by providing technical and financial assistance. Landowners and conservation partners are also spreading the news about Quail Focus Areas and the benefits of habitat management. Success will come one farm at a time. Every little bit helps! Listed below are highlights of two Quail Focus Areas.

Howell County Quail Focus Area

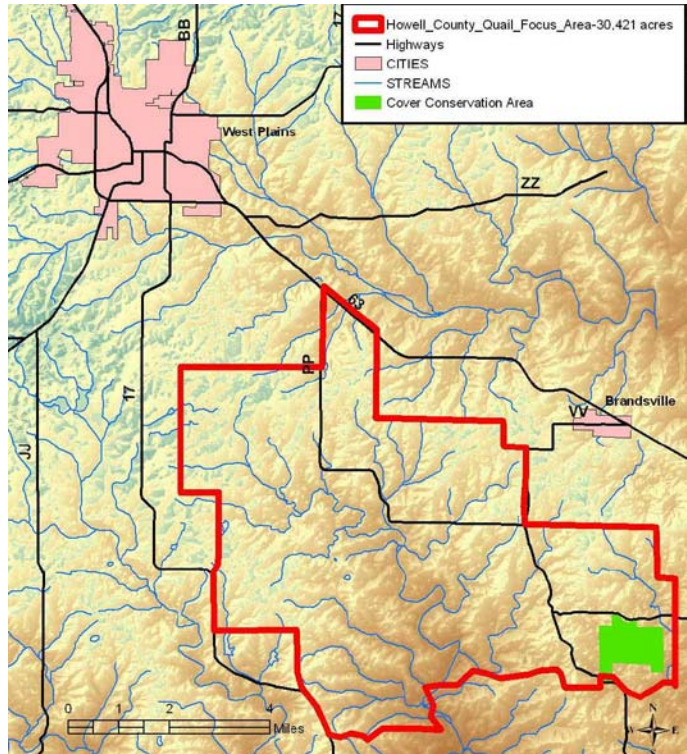
Person to Contact: Brad McKee, Private Land Conservationist

(417) 256-7117, ext. 114

County: Howell

Size: 30,422 acres

Focus Area Facts: Southeast of West Plains is the Howell County QFA. Cover Prairie Conservation Area, a Quail Emphasis Area also occurs within the focus area. Established in 2004, landowners have been busy converting fescue fields to native grasses and restoring open woodland and savannas – prime quail habitat. Department staff has partnered up with the local Quail Forever Chapter to conduct habitat tours, quail count training, a youth hunt, and several demonstration burns. Conservation partners like USDA, USFWS, NWTF, and QF have played a role in assisting with this focus area.



Indian Camp Slough Quail Focus Area

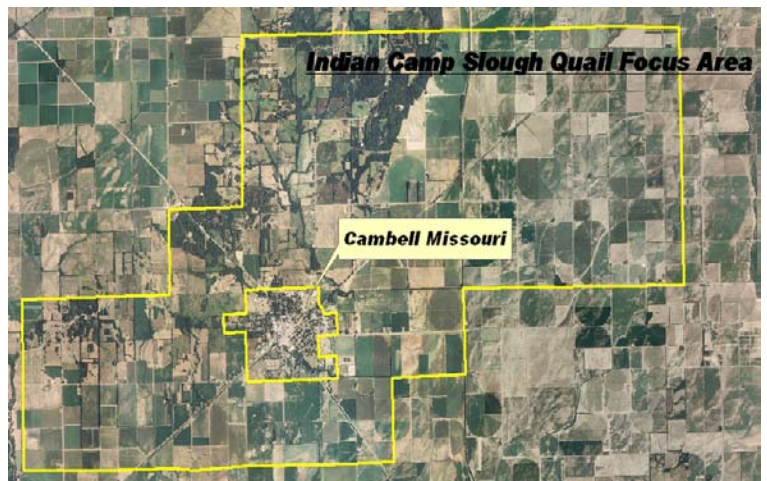
Person to Contact: Dave Wissehr, Private Land Conservationist

(573) 624-5939, ext. 136

County: Dunklin

Size: 18,690 acres

Focus Area Facts: Indian Camp Creek QFA is located between Malden and Campbell in Dunklin County. The new QFA was constructed as a result of the acceptance of the new SALT program in Dunklin County administered by the Dunklin County SWCD. The Crowley's Ridge SALT project is 43,642 acres in size. It provides landowners an incentive of \$600 for 5 years to install field borders, build exclusion fencing and develop edge feathering, which should be a real incentive to landowners interested in restoring quail habitat. Landowners within the focus area have already established thousands of acres of field borders as a result of the Conservation Security Program and EQIP Program.



How's your Nest Egg?

Kendall Coleman, Private Land Conservationist, Albany, MO

There are many choices available to each of us when we consider our retirement savings. You could invest in an IRA, a SEPP, a 401K, or annuity. There are also numerous choices to make, within each of these instruments, including money market, short term bonds, treasury bonds and long term bonds, small and large cap stock, or foreign stocks. Most of us will not take the time needed to learn and track, on a daily basis, exactly how each of these options might affect our account but each of us can quickly learn how risky each choice may be. Money market accounts and CD investments are usually considered to be a conservative investment, offering a modest but relatively stable return for little risk. A bond investment usually results in a higher return than a money market account, but not always. Higher potential for return usually means higher risk. Investing in foreign or domestic stocks can vary greatly but some options can be placed in the aggressive investment category. As we have experienced over the past several years, aggressive choices can result in a great advance during good times or a great retreat during times of trouble.



Many things in life are cyclic. The stock market goes up and down as do the populations of most species of wildlife. If quail were a stock it could arguably be placed in the aggressive category. Just like the stock market many variables affect quail populations. The weather, changing agricultural practices, the loss of grassland habitat, predation, and hunting are all factors affecting quail numbers. If you are like me you are probably seeing both your retirement investments as well as your investments in quail not match your expectations. I offer you some advice and encouragement on your "Nest Egg" investments.

Stay the Course

Most investors will agree that the worst move you can make is to panic and sell at the bottom. I know it's tempting to scale back or stop quail work during these trying times but a recovery could be right around the corner. Having your quail habitat in great condition, when any of the other factors cycle, is a great way to be in position to take advantage of a brisk recovery.

Stay Diversified

We are blessed in Missouri to have a wonderful assortment of both game and non-game critters. Early-successional habitat work that's beneficial for quail is also great for many other species. Develop an interest in prairie forbs, take a youth rabbit hunting or learn a few new song birds. I'll bet if you look closely you can find many rewards for your habitat efforts.

Invest for the Long Term

Wildlife population cycles can take a long time to go full circle. We humans like to manipulate our environment, but the truth is some things we can't control. Pace yourself, invest steadily by affecting the things that you can control, and take advantage of every opportunity to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Invest some Extra Stimulus

If you are passionate about quail you already know that a landowner's work is never done. Nesting cover, escape cover, brood cover, dusting areas, roosting cover, and covey headquarters are all basic need requirements for quail. Ideally each habitat type is offered in a small area and also distributed throughout your entire property. Occasionally take some time to step back and assess your property. Pick an area or cover type that you think your property lacks and do a little extra disking, offer an additional high energy food source, or plant an extra shrub thicket.

It's hard to predict where the market will be in 10 years and I don't know if quail numbers will ever return to the population we enjoyed in the 1960's. But, history does reveal the cyclic nature of things. If we all stay the course, diversify and take a long-term approach, when factors change we can all be ready to take advantage of a recovery.

CRP Mid-Contract Management Changes

Changes have been made to the Conservation Reserve Program mid-contract management (MCM) requirements for Missouri participants. The practices (prescribed burn, strip disk, chemical application) remain the same. However, the timeframes, amount of acres, and the number of times those acres must be managed have changed. The number of times each acre must be managed during the contract period has been reduced from 2 times to 1.

For new contracts 10-15 years in length, MCM practices will be required to be performed in contract years 3 through 6. MCM practices will be applied on approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the contract acreage per year. Thus, it will take you 2-3 years in that timeframe to complete your MCM requirements. Required MCM practices will be applied only after the stand is established. For all contracts 20 acres in size or less, MCM practices may be performed on 100 percent of the contract acreage during any 1 of contract years 3 through 6.

For established grasses that are enrolled or re-enrolled, MCM practices will be required to be performed in years 1 through 4. MCM practices will be applied on approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the contract acreage per year. Thus, it will take you 2-3 years in that timeframe to complete your MCM requirements. Required MCM practices will be applied only after the stand is established. For all contracts 20 acres in size or less, MCM practices may be performed on 100 percent of the contract acreage during any 1 of contract years 1 through 4.

You are highly encouraged to complete a second round of MCM on all re-enrollments and 10-15 year contracts. Cost-share is authorized for a second round of management. If you are interested in an additional round of management, contact your local Farm Service Agency before you start. New cost-share rates for MCM practices are as follows –

Disking - \$10/acre (you can now disk 7/16 – 3/31)

Prescribed Burn - \$16/acre

Chemical Application - \$10/acre

Interseed forb/legumes after a MCM practice– county average cost



A new item eligible for cost-share is mowing or disking in conjunction with the above practices. Mowing can be used prior to disking or chemical application at \$8/acre. Disking at \$10/acre can be used after a prescribed burn to further set-back the grass. Visit your local Farm Service Agency office for more information on MCM.

Plants you should know – American Hazelnut

American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), also called hazel or American filbert, is probably native to every county in Missouri. It grows in dense thickets on a wide variety of soils and sites. As an ornamental, it makes a good deciduous screen or barrier. The nut is consumed by humans and wildlife alike. It grows to a height of 10 feet with an 8 foot spread. Its leaves are alternate, simple, $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 inches long, broadly egg-to heart-shaped; edges coarsely doubly toothed; soft and hairy on the underside. The male flowers are yellowish catkins and the female flowers are inconspicuous along stem. The fruit is a globe-shaped nut enclosed in a leafy covering and usually in a cluster of 2 to 3 nuts. Hazelnut has a wide range for planting conditions, from sun to shade. This is great plant for landscaping, erosion control and food for both people and wildlife. Hazelnut should bear fruit within 5 to 7 years after planting. Bobwhites readily consume hazelnuts where they are available. The dense canopy of leaves provide good summer loafing and escape cover from predators. Add hazelnut to your covey headquarter shrub plantings. Plant on a 3x3 ft. spacing along with plum, blackberry and aromatic sumac.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR - Beef, Bobwhites and Biofuels: Integrating Wildlife and Agriculture is the theme of the June 17, 2010 MU Bradford Farm Field Day near Columbia. Presentations on quail and forage management begin at 2 PM followed by tours from 4 PM til dark. More information on the field day will appear in the May issue.

Spring Covey Headquarters Calendar

March

Disk your CRP acres until the end of the month

For quail, DO NOT burn thick stands of warm-season grass after 3/15

Continue your edge feathering and downed trees structure projects

Order your covey headquarter shrubs – <http://mdc.mo.gov/forest/nursery/seedling/>

April

Plant shrub seedlings early for best survival

Do not burn native grass now unless utilizing for forage or trying to eliminate fescue or brome

Burn fescue and brome to severely stunt grass, then strip disk and interseed legumes

Till and fertilize food plots

Spray invading fescue and brome under shrubs and around edge feathering with herbicides

May

Listen for male whistle calls on clear calm mornings

Quail and other grassland birds begin nesting – do not mow for cosmetic purposes

Seed food plots now for best results

Finish planting covey headquarter shrubs by June 1

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
Extension

 **NRCS** Natural Resources
Conservation Service

The Covey Headquarters Newsletter
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